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ABSTRACT

As part of International technical assistance, international aid organizations frequently sponsor candidates for advanced training programs in other countries. Because these programs are most often offered in English, the candidate needs to acquire a certain degree of English language knowledge. Therefore, English language training plays an important role in international assistance. Contrary to prior practices which found candidates receiving English language instruction in English-speaking countries, agencies today are finding it more practical to provide English language training in the candidate's home country. Problems faced in planning, administering, and teaching in English language programs of this type are discussed. Examples from the author's work with Agency for International Development (AID) programs in Portugal and in the Republic of Niger are presented. Program planning involves the acquisition of teachers, teaching materials, and funds, and the defining of teaching goals. These goals are set from test results and from working through a formula for estimating the required duration of AID intensive language programs. Also discussed is syllabus design for long and short-range goals and problems relating to interprogram communications, cash flow, materials, and personnel. (Author/JK)

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W.R. Ames

English for International Development Programs: Intensive

Since the spring of 1979, I have been working with programs in Portugal and the Republic of Niger to prepare AID sponsored candidates to attend institutions in the United States. I worked at the Instituto Politécnico de Vila Real in Portugal from April to July 1979 and have worked at the Centre Culturel Américain in Niamey, Niger from December 1979 to the present. In both places, the candidates selected by AID were already working on AID sponsored projects and were being sent to American institutions for the purpose of developing their technical skills in various fields.

In order to be accepted by academic or training programs in the United States, AID participants need English; the degree of competence required depends on the nature of the program. On the ALIGU tests (American Language Institute at Georgetown University), which we use, students applying for academic programs should score 85 points on the grammar and usage test, 75 points on the listening comprehension test, 75 points on the oral rating form and 65 points on the reading and vocabulary test. These scores are generally recognized to be equivalent to about 500 points on the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL).

In the past, AID has sent most of its candidates directly to English language schools in the United States. However, primarily because of costs, but also because it gives AID a longer period in which to observe the candidates and gain a better idea of their chances of academic success in the United States, the Agency finds it preferable to give its program participants English language training in their home countries whenever possible.

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Programs set up in home countries for AID candidates are often small (one to five people per class) and can be extremely flexible, depending on the specific needs of the students.

The purpose of this paper is to discuss the planning and administration of these small, tailor-made courses both on a practical level and also on a pedagogical level. I will attempt to explain what the problems in administering such programs can be and also how such problems can be avoided or overcome.

Initial Planning

Before an English language program can accept a request by AID to set up an intensive program, four things are necessary: teachers, teaching materials, funds, and clearly defined teaching goals. Teachers, teaching materials and funds are primarily a matter of administration and coordination and will be discussed later. Teaching goals are determined by the needs of the Agency (ie. to have the student up to the level of English required by his training program in a certain period of time) and the needs of the student (to succeed in his academic program and to function easily with Americans). When money, teachers and appropriate teaching materials have been arranged for, the English language program can give a tentative acceptance to AID and can begin planning the program.

Step one in planning one of these mini-programs is the gathering of information. The program planner needs to know how many students he will have, for how long, what they are supposed to be able to do when they leave the language program, and what is their current level of English. Although the Agency can usually supply some of the needed information, it can by no means supply all of it, since the Agency itself often does not have exact information on admissions requirements at the institutions to which the students will eventually go. Therefore,

it is usually the responsibility of the local English language training program to test the students and to predict how long it will take to bring them to the required levels.

Testing, then, is the first step in planning this kind of program. I administer the ALIGU battery of tests, which includes an oral interview, a grammar test, a reading test and a listening comprehension test. On the basis of the three written tests, I can put together a fairly accurate picture of the student's current level of English and I can make an estimate of the time required to bring the student up to level. For this I have been using a 'rule of thumb' arrived at by averaging the gains made by a group of five Portuguese participants over a four month period in 1979. (These were my students at Vila Real, Portugal). I tested my students at the end of every 30 hours of instruction and found that the average gain per test was 8 points, or 32 points on the test battery. In Niger, where I have done a similar study, the average gain per test was nearer 5 points, or 20 points on the test battery.

When I make an estimate of the total time required to bring a student up to required level, I use the following 'rule of thumb' formula.

$$\frac{T-S}{G} = D$$

T--Total of scores required by the program in the U.S.
S--Total of the student's scores on the test battery
G--Total of average expected gain per X number of hours of instruction
D--Number of X hour periods necessary to bring student up to required level of English

I want to stress here that many variables are not taken into account in the application of the above formula. Since it is only a primitive measure evolved to meet a specific local need, I do not claim that it is the best possible method. In the future, I hope to see a system which will take into account the student's educational background, cultural orientation, age and general range of experience. Furthermore, I hope that such a system will include some kind of factor which will help us make more accurate predictions for beginning students since the 'rule of thumb' formula is decidedly more accurate for intermediate and advanced level students than for beginners.

One possible explanation for the differing average rates of point gain per test between my Portuguese students (8 points per test) and my African students (5 points per test) may be unfamiliarity with the test format. A Nigerien, unless he has had an American as an English instructor, may naver have seen a multiple choice exam. Therefore, it seems reasonable to assure that African students will lose a certain number of points due to poor test taking strategies.

Another factor which seems to have a pronounced influence on student progress is the general level of his or her experience. In Portugal, almost all of my students had been to university and had lived overseas. Furthermore, the cultural milieu in which they lived was quite rich: books, newspapers and the media were easily available and were of good quality. In Niger, on the other hand, only half of the English Language Program's students have been beyond secondary school and only half have traveled outside of French-speaking West Africa. Available books are expensive and of limited variety. Furthermore, because of economic and geographical factors there is, in effect, access to only one radio and television network, which is strictly controlled

by the government and which is directed to an illiterate, provincial audience. The net result of this situation is that many times we come upon subject matter in our textbooks which our students have never heard of. Thus, the teacher sometimes finds himself teaching more than just language.

Given the aforementioned cultural and educational factors, I think it is necessary to place special emphasis on the oral interview part of the ALIGU tests and on other impressions the planner can gather in talking with the student. The planner should be particularly alert to certain things; for example, the quality of the student's conversation in terms of range and depth and the degree of difficulty the student seems to have in understanding and following test instructions. These bits of information can help the planner anticipate how cultural factors may affect the student's rate of progress.

In summary, initial tests give a practical base from which to begin planning the student's language program. Factors such as grammar, vocabulary and listening comprehension can be measured by objective tests and courses to develop various language skills can be defined for them. Also, cultural factors have to be taken into consideration from the beginning.

Initial tests are only the first step in the planning process, however. They can only give the program planner an incomplete picture of the student. The orientation of the program must be reviewed regularly on the basis of the student's performance on tests which are administered at regularly spaced intervals, teachers' impressions, the student's won comments on his or her program and the requirements of the student's technical program. Our students are retested at the end

of every sixty hours of instruction and periodic meetings are held to discuss readjustments in the student's program as the need arises.

Syllabus Design

In planning a syllabus for an AID intensive program, one must make a distinction between long-range and short-range goals. In the long run, we hope to provide the student all of the skills he needs for academic success and easy socio-cultural adjustment. In the short run, however, our concern is to get the candidate to the United States as soon as possible. In other words, we want him to get passing scores on the ALIGU tests. The primary problem, then is deciding whether the program will concentrate on developing separate as opposed to integrated skills, to what extent English for Specific Purposes will be integrated into the program, how much emphasis will be placed on cross-cultural orientation and how much work will be done on improving the student's study skills.

Because we are pressed for time, but also because we are unsure of what cross-cultural and study skills need to be taught, the English Language Program in Niger concentrates primarily on achieving short-term rather than long-term goals. That is to say, we attept to prepare our students to pass the ALIGU tests at the earliest possible date. Consequently, our programs are primarily oriented toward skills which are tested on the ALIGU battery; namely, English grammar, listening comprehension, oral production and reading. English for Specific Purposes, if needed, can be integrated into the intensive reading section of the reading course, but should not be allowed to overshadow the kind of extensive general reading that is essential in building up the b d vocabulary base needed to qualify on the ALIGU reading test. Cross-cultural modules and study skill building activities can be

supplied if the student needs them, but they are not stressed in the curriculum.

Since we are concentrating on preparing our students to pass examinations on specific language skills, the program is divided up into skills areas also. Thus, separate classes are run for reading, speaking, listening comprehension, writing and grammar rather than a more integrated program such as one would have if one followed a series of standardized textbooks such as Let's Learn English or English 900. In fact, we are not 100% consistent on this point. We find it very useful with beginners to follow a standardized textbook series. With lower intermediates we continue to follow the series but we supplement it with special grammar and reading classes. It is only with the higher intermediates and the advanced students that we follow a separate skills syllabus. The separate skills syllabus is useful because it is much easier to readjust the relative proportions of skills taught should the student be weak in one of them.

In reading, we try to use both general interest materials, such as short stories and essays, and also special purpose material such as technical literature in the student's area of specialization. Our extensive reading exercises are done mostly with general literature of limited difficulty. We find this useful for the development of vocabulary and reading speed. For intensive reading practice, however, we try to make use of samples of literature from the student's field of study. Since the student knows that this is the kind of material that he will have to deal with in his program of technical study, problems of motivation are usually non-existent. Furthermore, since the student is usually already somewhat familiar with the specific vocabulary and the conceptual framework of the text he is studying, it is easier

for the teacher to point out and demonstrate rhetorical devices in the text such as pronoun reference and the role of connectives in signalling the interrelationships of ideas.

Because of the way grammar is tested on the ALIGU, I think it is important for students to have a class that is devoted exclusively to it. We find that many of our students who have followed an integrated course where grammar is taught implicitly, score disastrously on multiple choice tests even though they can express themselves very well orally. For our purposes, grammar has to be taught explicitly. Consequently, we set aside a definite number of teaching hours per week for a comprehensive review of English grammar.

In French-speaking Africa there are special problems with teaching listening comprehension. Casual contact with native English speakers is rare. Also, as I mentioned earlier, there is little media contact with the outside world. The U.S. International Communications Agency (USICA) provides us with good material, such as Voice of America recordings and the Progressive Listening Series. However, even these materials do not provide a wide enough variety of voices, accents and situations. This is especially true if we are sending our students to American university campuses where many of their friends, colleagues and even some of their instructors are going to be non-native speakers of English with non-American accents. Therefore, our students should not only be prepared to hear and understand Standard American English, but should also have exposure to a variety of ESL accents.

I think that writing, although it is not a skill directly tested by the ALIGU, is too important to neglect. Since most of our students are going into scientific or technical programs, we estimate that their greatest needs are going to be in the areas of physical, spatial, causal

and temporal description. Thus, my teachers and I have organized a series of practical writing assignments in order for the student to practice various kinds of descriptive writing. We have taken our materials from a number of sources, but we have found that the volume, Nucleus:General Science (Longman, ed. Martin Bates and Tony Dudley-Evans, 1976) is easily adaptable for this purpose.

In general, speaking seems less important to the candidate's academic success than other skills. Therefore, although we do not ignore it, we do not give it the same value that is customary in our other courses. I recognize the value of learning to pose questions which will obtain information the student requires. However, aside from this, I regard oral production skills as secondary to listening comprehension, reading comprehension and writing skills.

There are two major reasons why the program tends to emphasize short-term goals (ie. passing the ALIGU tests) over long-term goals (ie. providing the student with everything he may need in terms of study skills and cultural orientation). First, our students' needs are poorly defined. We have little information concerning the nature, location and duration of the student's program. Second, and more important than the first, we are pressed for time. At the minimum, we attempt to provide students with basic skills such as reading, listening comprehension and writing. Time limitations rarely allow us to go very far beyond this. Occasionally, we decide that a certain aspect of culture (such as the American idea of 'friendship' as opposed to the West African idea) or a certain study skill (such as note taking) will be crucial to a student's success in his program. When that happens, we develop a teaching module for the particular problem.

For better or worse, our method of testing has a powerful influence on the shape of the language program. The ALIGU tests measure reading, vocabulary, listening comprehension and grammar, but do not provide information about the student's ability to take notes in class, to pose questions that will elicit information he wants, or to express himself clearly on paper. The relationship of ALIGU test scores to student success is not sufficiently clear (although Georgetown University may have made detailed studies of this). However, because of the importance placed on these tests by AID and by the training programs as a controlling device in measuring academic and linguistic readiness to enter university programs in the United States, the skills measured on English language tests used for AID intensive programs ought to correspond as accurately as possible to the skills that will be required of the students when they arrive in their academic or technical programs. In short, we have to depend very heavily on the predictive power of these tests: if the tests do not test skills the students will need, there is a danger that a language program conditioned by these tests will fail to teach necessary skills.

Administration

Now that I have discussed the major academic aspects of establishing and running special intensive programs for AID, I would like to consider the five basic problem areas in administering them. These are, namely, communications, money, staff, students and materials.

Information transfer is a constant problem, since communications chronically break down between either the technical training program and the sponsoring agency, different offices of the sponsoring agency,

or between the sponsoring agency and the English language program. Information about the number of candidates, their level and their starting and finishing dates is always tentative, and it is often hard to plan a program until you have seen the students themselves.

A good example of how communications breakdown can de-rail the English language program planner's plans happened to us between July and September of 1980. On July 18, our school received a letter from AID requesting us to set up a program for a student who was to be flown in from Upper Volta for a five week intensive program which was to end by September 1, 1980. We immediately replied with a memorandum saying that we could offer such a program (5 weeks, 6 hours daily, five days per week) to begin on July 28th. July 28th passed and there was no news from Upper Volta. The next news arrived on August 20th, when the student arrived in Niamey. This caused me considerable worry and embarassment since the teachers I had hired would come in daily asking for news. Furthermore, the teacher to whom I had offered the greater part of the teaching load told me she was quitting because she was tired of waiting. Fortunately, the student arrived that same day.

Admittedly, the above is an extreme case. However, it is not unusual because, as with all assistance projects, one has to deal with at least two complicated bureaucracies. In the case of our students, they are usually employees of the host country government who are working on AID sponsored projects and who are being sent to the United States to improve their technical skills. Coordination has to be made between AID in country, AID in Washington, the host country government, the technical training program , and the language training program. Fortunately for the language program director, most of the burden of satisfying conflicting demands falls on the shoulders of the AID program director. Still, it can also cause us problems.

Money can be a particular headache since there is usually a delay of about two months between services rendered to AID and payment therefor. This is because invoices for our region must be sent to the AID Comptroller's Office for approval, to the project coordinator's office for his signature, to Paris for processing and back to Niger for payment. Our arrangement is to bill AID once every two weeks, and to pay our teachers on a bi-weekly basis out of general funds. Therefore, the English language program must anticipate a certain strain on cash flow.

To minimize this problem, we schedule the beginning of an AID intensive program for a time when we have a cash surplus, usually just after the beginning of a new term of our Evening Program, for which the students must pay tuition in advance. The checks from AID begin to arrive at about the same time our funds from the Evening Program run out.

This system greatly simplifies paperwork by funneling all incoming checks into one bank account. It also facilitates recruiting for AID funded programs since teachers are paid as promptly for teaching them as for teaching other courses. In effect, the English language program acts as a financial buffer between AID and the teacher.

Although this system is simpler than the previous one (in which the teachers were paid directly by AID) it can be dangerous. Should payments from AID be delayed for an unusually long period, the entire English language program runs short of money and the problem of late payments, instead of being limited to just one facet of the English language program, affects every facet.

Therefore, we would advise language programs that are considering setting up programs for AID to be extra careful not to overcommit

themselves finacially. The best way to guard against this is either to limit the proportion of AID participation in the total English program or to keep the AID paperwork separate and pay teachers for those classes only when the checks for them have arrived from AID.

Problems with students are minimal, but we have noticed a certain amount of fatigue if the program goes on for a long time and a definite loss of enthusiasm if the student's departure date is kept indefinite for too long. Our students need to see progress and they need assurance that they have not been forgotten by the bureaucracy. Although we regard this as natural and try to encourage our students where possible, there have been occasions where our students have tried to use the program director or one of his teachers as a lever with which to manipulate AID machinery. In one instance, for example, a student asked me to convince the AID program director to provide him with transportation to and from school. In another instance, I was asked to write a letter to the Minister of Public Works requesting extra time off for one of my students so that he could study his English more. I advise language program directors to avoid these situations because they can lead to serious problems with AID. Perhaps the best thing to do is give the student the AID program coordinator's phone number and suggest (firmly) that he try to resolve his own problem.

Supplying materials for a small program such as this is rarely a serious problem. I consider it really essential to have a grammar book such as English Structure in Focus by Polly Davis or A Rapid Review of English Grammar by Jean Praninskas. One should also supply a good quantity of fiction and non-fiction reading material. For this purpose, a series of good quality ESL intermediate level readers should be provided. There can never be too much listening material. Therefore, we advise that English language programs should stock a wide variety

of listening materials and should also make provision to loan out cassettes and books to students if they request them in order to capitalize on their motivation, since the extra work that students do outside of class can make an important contribution to their in-class performance.

Recruiting teachers for these programs is also relatively easy. Many of our teachers in Niger are wives of embassy personnel. Many of these women have limited French and limited exposure to Africans: therefore, working with the program often gives them much needed stimulation and a chance to make contact with educated Nigeriens. Few of our teachers in these programs have much experience or training as language teachers. However, since our classes are small and since we use standard texts with teacher's manuals, our teachers usually have adequate instructions. Furthermore, since class size, pacing and group dynamics are not paramount issure, as they might be with larger groups, these are relatively easy classes to teach. In fact, we find that the AID intensive classes are an excellent place to start beginning teachers.

In Conclusion

I have discussed the major academic and administrative aspects of planning, establishing and maintaining small, intensive English programs for preparing AID sponsored candidates to enter programs of study in the United States. On the academic side, I have talked about the factors of time and distance which make the ALIGU tests a controlling factor in our teaching priorities. On the practical side, I have described our major problem areas; namely those relating to inter-program communications, cash flow, materials and personnel. I cannot say that all of our problems have been solved, since each

new program brings new ones. It is probably more accurate to say that now that my teachers and I have survived several difficult periods we are better equipped to deal with new problems as they arise. Furthermore, we hope that this discussion will help others to do the same.

APPENDIX

'Rule of Thumb' for Estimating Required Duration of AID Intensive Programs

$\frac{T-S}{G}$ equals D

T--Total of scores required by U.S. Program
S--Total of the student's scores on the initial battery of tests
G--Total expected average gain on test battery per X hours of instruction
D--Number of X hour periods necessary to arrive at target level of English

In our situation:
T--300 points on the ALIGU tests for acceptance into academic programs
G--35 points per 60 hours of instruction (variable from place to place--this may be specific to Niger)

The following example should clarify how the 'rule of thumb' can be applied in a specific situation.

EXAMPLE:
name: MOUSSA Ibrahim
country: Niger
native language: Djerma

name of test	student scores	target scores	target gain
Grammar and Usage	24 points	85 points	61 points
Vocab. and Reading	20 points	65 points	45 points
Listening Test	35 points	75 points	40 points
Oral Rating	40 points	75 points	35 points
	S--119 points	T--300 points	(T-S)--118 points

$\frac{T-S}{G}$ or $\frac{118}{35}$ equals (approximately) 5 sixty hour periods of instruction

Recommendation: the student, MOUSSA Ibrahim, should be given a minimum of 300 hours of classroom instruction before he enters his academic program.